VARGAS ISLAND PROVINCIAL PARK

PURPOSE STATEMENT AND ZONING PLAN

February 2003

Approved by:

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Date: Feb. 27/03

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Date: March 11, 2003

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Purpose Statement and Zoning Plan

Primary Role
The **primary** role of Vargas Island Park is to protect the natural values associated with the temperate rainforest on the west coast of Vancouver Island. Much of this type of forest has been developed through forestry and is no longer in its natural state. The park protects a raised beach with dune-wetland complex, a shoreline-dune complex, Sitka spruce forest, and habitat for numerous rare and endangered species including spawning and rearing habitat for genetically distinct salmon.

The park protects the rugged outer coast of Vargas Island, Blunden Island and the marine environment. Many marine features are represented in the park including exposed rocky coast, sand beaches, kelp beds, sheltered channels and bays, a lagoon, and mudflats. These habitats are excellent for marine mammals including gray whales, invertebrates, resident and migrating seabirds and intertidal/subtidal organisms.

The park area surrounds Cleland Island Ecological Reserve, home to a great diversity of nesting sea bird colonies. Access to the island is prohibited.

Vargas Island Park contributes to the protection of the Coastal Western Hemlock vh1 biogeoclimatic variant and the Windward Island Mountains Ecosection, which are both well represented in the protected areas system. It also contributes to protecting the Vancouver Island Shelf *Marine* Ecosection, which is poorly protected at 5.4%.

Secondary Role
The **secondary** role is to provide a recreation opportunity for kayakers and other boaters who are looking for a remote and wilderness coastal experience. Clayoquot Sound is a popular destination area for boaters, particularly kayakers who are seeking the remote natural setting of the west coast with sandy beaches and undisturbed forests. Together with Maquinna Marine, Gibson Marine and Flores Island parks, Vargas Island Park provides both a stopping point for visitors enroute to or from Hot Springs Cove and other protected areas, and a popular destination with its beaches for camping and small islets for exploring. Migrating gray whales that feed in Ahous Bay, substantial seabird colonies and other marine mammals contribute to popular wildlife viewing opportunities. Wilderness camping is allowed but there are no developed facilities at Vargas Island Park.

Tertiary Role
The tertiary role is to protect cultural features. Clayoquot Sound has a vibrant First Nations heritage, both past and present. Beaches were popular gathering and village sites and are found in many of the protected areas in Clayoquot Sound. The park is rich in First Nations sites and post–contact sites such as the trail across the park that capture glimpses of the past.

Management Issues

Known Management Issue	Response
Public safety - beach landings by airplanes creating a potentially dangerous situation with campers	➢ Work with BC Aviation Council to resolve public safety issue.
Cabin trespasses in park	➢ Develop strategy to remove trespasses. ➢ Restore and rehabilitate site.
Trail access from the east side is through private land and/or I.R.	➢ Work with First Nation and private land owner(s) to resolve access.
Impacts on park values as a result of increased level of use by kayak campers – site degradation, habituation of wildlife, impacts on cultural sites.	➢ Develop recreation plan (for all Clayoquot Sound protected areas) to develop strategy for visitor facilities and public information on appropriate behaviours. Work with First Nations where appropriate. ➢ Undertake an ecosystem management plan. ➢ Consider restrictions in visitor numbers to maintain a high quality experience.
Increasing commercial wildlife viewing activity and its effect on wildlife	➢ Develop wildlife viewing guidelines in conjunction with commercial operators. ➢ Consider initiating a permit system for whale watching tour companies.
Relationships with First Nations and pending treaty settlements	➢ Develop good working relationships with First Nations to develop an understanding and appreciation of protected area status and park values. ➢ Liaise with Central Region Board (CRB) to inform them of management issues in park.
Participation in Biosphere Reserve	➢ Work with Biosphere Foundation and CRB to ensure Environmental Stewardship Division's perspective is taken into account in Biosphere activities and projects.
Lack of knowledge and awareness of cultural and natural values	➢ Undertake cultural inventory and traditional use study of whole park in conjunction with First Nations. ➢ Undertake inventory of natural values including keystone species and rare elements. ➢ In conjunction with First Nations, develop interpretative information on park values and appropriate behaviour.
Extraction of marine resources from both commercial harvesting and recreational sport fishing	➢ Work with DFO on commercial fishery closures and the monitoring of sports fishing and impact on stocks.

Zoning

Special Feature Zone – covers sensitive sand dune complex, an area of approximately 225 hectares or 4% of the park. The objective of this zone is to protect and present significant natural or cultural features, resources, or processes because of their special character, fragility and heritage values.

Natural Environment Zone – covers the rest of the park, an area of approximately 5,563 hectares or 96% of the park. The objective of this zone is to protect scenic values and to provide recreation opportunities in a largely undisturbed natural environment.

Conservation

Representation - ecosection	☒	Contributes minimally to the well-represented Windward Island Mountains (WIM) Ecosection (17.4% protected). Vargas Island Park contributes only 0.78% to the overall representation of this ecosection. It also contributes 6.6% to the Vancouver Island Shelf *Marine* Ecosection, which is poorly represented in the protected area system at 5.4%.
- biogeoclimatic subzone/variant	☒	Makes a small contribution of 1.8% to the representation of the well-represented CWHvh1, which has 19.3% protected provincially.
Special Features	☒	Raised beaches; active dune system; saltwater lagoon; system of paleo dune ridges; coho spawning and rearing habitat.
Rare/Endangered Values	☒	Rare plants in bogs between dunes. *Blue-listed* plants sand-dune sedge and Tracy's romanzoffia which are rare on Vancouver Island and *blue-listed* plant California wax myrtle that only occurs in the Tofino-Ucluelet region. *Red-listed* sea otter and northern sea lion. *Blue-listed* gray whale, Cassin's auklet, tufted puffin.
Scientific/Research Opportunities	☒	Rare and endangered species

Recreation

Representation backcountry	☒	Wild, remote marine experience
destination	☒	Outstanding sandy beaches; whale watching; bird watching; kayak camping; hiking.
travel corridor	☒	Internationally significant kayaking and boating route
local recreation	☒	Sports fishing, kayaking, camping, hiking, SCUBA diving
Special Opportunities	☒	Gray whale, other marine mammal and sea bird viewing
Education/Interpretation Opportunities	☒	Natural and cultural values

Cultural Heritage

Representation	☒	Post contact history; telegraph – life saving trail, defensive position; traditional land use.
Special Feature	☒	First Nations; village, fortified and burial sites, and culturally modified trees.

Other Management Considerations

Other Designations	☒	Part of Clayoquot Sound Biosphere Reserve
Relationship to other PAs	☒	Part of a system of protected areas in Clayoquot Sound
Co-operative Management Arrangements	☒	Covered by the Interim Measurements Extension Agreement with the Central Regional Board. Commercial fishery closure specific to the park: geoduck and horseclam in Ahous Bay, goose barnacle in intertidal zone surrounding Cleland Island; gray whale sanctuary.
Partnerships	☐	Adjacent private land held by Nature Conservancy
Vulnerability	☒	Recreation impacts on rare and endangered species and cultural features
Relationship to other Strategies	☒	Interim Measures Extension Agreement; identified for protection in the 1993 Clayoquot Sound Land Use Decision. Marine Protected Areas Strategy.

Area: 5,788 hectares (1,749 ha upland; 4,039 ha foreshore)

Date of establishment: July 12, 1995

Zoning Map - Vargas Island Provincial Park

Projection: Albers Equal Areas
Datum: NAD83

Natural Environment
Special Feature
Protected Area Boundary

0 7
km

Produced in Feb 2003 for
Ministry of Water, Land and Air
Protection by MSRM, Decision
Support Services

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